

CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE SEVEN HUNDRED AND SIXTY-FIRST PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva
on Thursday, 20 March 1997, at 10 a.m.

President:

Mr. Berdennikov

(Russian Federation)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I declare open the 761st plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

First of all I should like to express gratitude to my predecessors in the Chair, Ambassador Sun of the Republic of Korea and Mr. Grecu from Romania, for all the efforts they made to get today's meeting off to a smooth start. I would also like, on behalf of the Conference and on my own behalf, to extend a very warm welcome to the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Mrs. Siri Bjerke, who will be the first speaker at today's meeting. Her presence among us yet again today testifies to the continued interest of her Government in our work and the importance it attaches to the multilateral approach to arms control and disarmament.

I also have on my list of speakers today the representatives of Italy, Switzerland, Iran and the United States of America.

As we all know, two of our distinguished colleagues, Ambassadors S. Ledogar of the United States and A. Vattani of Italy, will soon be leaving the Conference. Ambassador Ledogar has represented his country in this Conference for more than seven years with remarkable diplomatic skill and talent. We all remember his outstanding personal contribution to the negotiations on the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, and we give him his due for his human qualities. Ambassador Vattani successfully steered the Conference at a difficult time, and we all owe him a debt of gratitude for his efforts to lay the ground for substantive work at the start of the 1995 session. I am sure I speak on behalf of all of us in wishing Ambassadors Ledogar and Vattani and their families happiness and every success for the future.

Before giving the floor to the speakers on the list, I should like in my capacity as representative of the Russian Federation to read out a letter addressed to the participants in the Conference by the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, E. Primakov, in connection with the accession of a representative of Russia to the post of President of the CD.

"Greetings to the participants in the session of the Conference on Disarmament.

"The activities of the Conference on Disarmament - the sole forum in which practical talks on disarmament issues are conducted on a multilateral basis and in a global framework - are followed with attention and interest in Russia. Our country strives to contribute to the success of the work of the Conference, whose achievements have earned it well-deserved authority in the eyes of the world community. They include such important international instruments in the field of arms limitation and disarmament as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Convention on the Prohibition of Biological and Toxin Weapons, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, etc.

"I should like to assure the participants in the Conference that, in the post of President, Russia will do its utmost to ensure the success of the work of this forum."

(The President)

I am sure that this message reflects the importance which Russia attaches to the work of the CD in the present situation.

(continued in English)

It gives me pleasure to now give the floor to the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Mrs. Siri Bjerke.

Mrs. BJERKE (Norway): May I first congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and assure you of the support of the Norwegian Government? I also take this opportunity to thank Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky for his contribution as Secretary-General to the work of this Conference.

This is the first time that I have the honour to address the CD since Norway became a full member of the Conference. Finally we are able to take part in the consultations and negotiations on global disarmament and non-proliferation issues within the CD as an equal partner. It remains our conviction that the same right should be granted to all countries that express the wish to join the Conference. The CD derives its legitimacy from the assumption that it is a universal and representative negotiating body. But it is neither global, nor fully representative, if countries that have a legitimate stake in the issues before us do not have the same opportunity to safeguard their interests as those who currently are members.

The end of the cold war has made possible major achievements in global non-proliferation and disarmament. We now have a unique opportunity to build on the achievements made by developing a new European security architecture. An increased role for OSCE, the development of a new NATO and a special relationship between NATO and Russia are contributions to greater security for all States and will thereby further the disarmament process.

The Conference on Disarmament has reason to be proud of its contributions to these endeavours. The Chemical Weapons Convention of 1992, negotiated in these chambers, is finally in the process of entering into force. We hope that the present efforts to ensure ratification by the United States and the Russian Federation will be successful. Their participation in the global treaty-based regime to remove chemical weapons from the face of the Earth is crucial.

The CTBT, negotiated by many of you sitting around this table, is an equally important milestone in the annals of global disarmament. After the resumed session of the first CTBTO PrepCom here in Geneva, the process towards establishing a CTBT organization is now finally on its way. Norway will support the work by the Provisional Technical Secretariat to build up an effective and credible verification system within the necessary time-frame.

But substantive steps to curb the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have also been taken outside these chambers. The successful NPT Extension and Review Conference in 1995 was a particularly important event in the efforts to curb the threat of one of the most deadly dangers to human existence - nuclear weapons. The "Principles and objectives" document from

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the 1995 NPT Conference sets out a concrete agenda for the follow-up process. My Government will take an active part in the PrepCom process to strengthen the non-proliferation regime.

Tomorrow the sixth session of the Ad Hoc Group to strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention will end. This process is now slowly moving in the right direction. During the next session in July, it should be possible to have more comprehensive and focused deliberations. Our aim should be to present a proposal for a verification protocol in 1998.

Regional and unilateral steps have also been important to reduce the nuclear threat. In Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia, agreements have been reached to lower the levels of armaments or to ban the development of nuclear weapons altogether. But regional conflicts have also shown the lethal impact of modern conventional weapons on civilians and refugees. As long as innocent civilians continue to die or to be maimed by arms, long after the conflicts are ended, our global disarmament agenda remains unfinished.

The question faced by the international disarmament community, therefore, is not whether there are more tasks to be undertaken in our efforts towards more stable and predictable human security. The question is which issues should be negotiated first, and how negotiations can best be structured to reach relevant and realistic objectives. The Conference on Disarmament will continue to be one key instrument to negotiate global agreements on disarmament issues, but only if it can agree on relevant objectives. If progress in the CD is blocked by the fact that States have different security interests or objectives, then negotiations will be taken elsewhere. The credibility of the CD depends on its ability to deliver concrete agreements. This credibility is damaged if the CD is used as a vehicle to block achievable progress, by making negotiations on one issue hostage to simultaneous movement on others.

Nuclear issues should and will continue to be an important topic on the global multilateral disarmament agenda. In this context, nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation should not be viewed as separate processes. For non-proliferation efforts to succeed, further concrete progress must be demonstrated towards reducing the political and strategic significance of nuclear weapons in international politics.

A global ban on nuclear weapons must be the ultimate objective. The nuclear-weapons States have an obligation - enshrined in the NPT - to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in international politics. This obligation is one step in a process aiming at a legal codification of systematic and progressive efforts to reduce and eliminate those weapons.

The nuclear-weapons States must live up to this responsibility. We have consistently urged them to fully implement existing arms control and disarmament agreements. Furthermore, an early start of negotiations on reductions of strategic arsenals beyond those prescribed by START II, involving, as appropriate, also the other nuclear-weapons States, will not only contribute to a militarily safer world, but also be conducive to a more constructive and dynamic international climate. Importance should also be

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attached to further reductions in tactical nuclear weapons, and to their destruction. We know that thousands of tactical nuclear weapons have been withdrawn and put into storage. These weapons must be destroyed, and not merely stored. It is important to ensure that this part of the disarmament process is also continued, as proposed in earlier unilateral declarations.

The particular responsibility of nuclear-weapon States for nuclear disarmament should not be diluted. This is why it is difficult both in political and practical terms to transfer the responsibility for negotiations on nuclear disarmament from the nuclear-weapons States to multilateral forums. We are prepared to take part in discussions on nuclear disarmament issues in the CD. But to us, it is essential that the primary responsibility of the nuclear-weapon States is not to be diverted through such a process.

Several ideas have been launched to suggest how we could proceed on a broad scale in our efforts to address the nuclear issues. Some constructive ideas have been put forward in the report of the Canberra Commission. In our own approach to the wider problems related to nuclear activities, we have two basic assumptions. Firstly, it is increasingly evident that the potential risks of proliferation are inherent in both military and civilian nuclear activities. Secondly, the international disarmament agenda should also encompass the so-called "management of disarmament". The "management of disarmament" concerns the problems relating to the implementation of nuclear and chemical disarmament processes in particular, including the secure and environmentally safe handling of material from weapons scheduled for destruction. As a response to the serious challenges posed by these activities, the Norwegian Government has drawn up a plan of action on nuclear activities and chemical weapons in areas adjacent to our northern borders. One priority area of this plan is the management, storage and disposal of spent nuclear fuel and radioactive waste. Our goal is, in cooperation with other interested States, to achieve safe, cost-effective operations under an independent control and inspection mechanism, and in keeping with internationally accepted principles and guidelines.

Negotiations on an agreement prohibiting the production of fissile material for weapons purposes should be the next major item on the agenda of the CD. After the conclusion of the CTBT this would be in accordance with the "Principles and objectives" agreed at the NPT Review Conference in 1995. A cut-off agreement is an important means of reducing the availability of fissile material. The inclusion of measures to monitor enrichment and reprocessing facilities would strengthen a "cut-off" treaty. Such monitoring could be applied without undue interference with remaining military stockpiles.

We should work towards greater openness regarding the stocks of fissile material held by nuclear Powers. As a first step, the nuclear Powers should, on a voluntary basis, provide detailed information on their stocks of plutonium and highly enriched uranium. A second step could be to ensure cooperative measures to clarify and confirm those declarations. As a third step, the nuclear Powers could permit international inspection of their stocks, with the aim of ensuring that the inventory in storage can be taken out only for non-weapons purposes. As a fourth step, agreed monitored net

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reductions from these stockpiles could be introduced. Finally, as a last step in this context, consistent and stringent international standards of accounting and security for fissile materials might be established. Greater transparency is an essential confidence-building measure. Done in parallel, this would also facilitate cut-off negotiations.

The plague caused by widespread and indiscriminate use of anti-personnel landmines (APLs) is among the most urgent humanitarian issues facing us today. The military utility of APLs is far exceeded by their cost in human and socio-economic terms in affected countries, of which most are in the third world. Every single day, APLs cause tragedies among innocent civilians. Uncleared mines and minefields prevent much-needed socio-economic development in many societies long after hostilities have ended.

Norway has been heavily engaged in mine-clearing activities in different conflict areas and, in particular, in Africa, Asia and now Europe. Mine-clearing will continue to be a priority in many post-conflict situations. We do see the need for expanding existing mine-clearing capacity, and certainly for improving mine-clearing technology. But there will always be technical, financial and other factors constraining the number of mines to be cleared every day. Today the world is losing this battle; new deployments of APLs by far outstrip present mine-clearing capabilities. For many Governments, including the Norwegian, it is increasingly difficult to justify the fact that our efforts are directed mostly towards remedial measures, after the damage is done. As always, preventive action is much more effective, and certainly much cheaper, both in terms of money and - more importantly - in terms of human suffering.

My Government has reached the conclusion that a total ban on production, transfer and use of APLs would be the only way to stop this plague. That is why we introduced a national moratorium on the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of APLs in 1995. That is why we removed and destroyed all APLs in Norwegian military stockpiles last year. Our position on APLs was reached after careful assessment of our national and allied defence needs and the humanitarian costs involved. We do know that there are military implications and costs of the renunciation of APLs. But we have found no effective, acceptable alternative to a ban on all APLs as quickly as possible.

Immediate measures to ban APLs are called for. That is why Norway welcomed the initiation of the Ottawa Process. This is a channel for like-minded countries to speedily conclude an international agreement on a total ban on APLs. This is the instrument by which we can respond to international momentum to accelerate the process towards a total ban. This growing momentum includes a steadily increasing number of Governments, parliamentarians and a strong public opinion. It is supported by humanitarian agencies and by countries affected by the APL plague. We have to exploit this momentum. We are correspondingly sceptical of any efforts that might serve to have it derailed or delayed. An agreement in the CD seems to be blocked by the fact that many members cannot - for the time being - accept a total ban.

The Ottawa Process is not universal, but is open to any country sharing the goal of an international agreement on a total ban on APLs by December this

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year. The lack of universality, which seems elusive even in other forums, is not an excuse for not moving ahead. A successful conclusion of the Ottawa Process would establish a new international norm prohibiting the use of APLs. Once this norm is established, we will work to make it universal.

We would favour a text which is short and simple. It should clearly and unequivocally prescribe a comprehensive ban where the key objective is to prohibit the use of APLs. A "step-by-step" or "phased" approach which does not address this fundamental issue would not respond to the humanitarian concerns that we have.

We do not see that a legally binding ban on APLs needs traditional verification instruments as contained in disarmament agreements. We agree with the widespread view that complete verifiability is neither feasible, nor necessary, nor desirable. It is difficult to conceptualize efficient verification measures, but at the same time, it is very unlikely that it will be possible to hide the actual use of APLs.

An APL ban and mine-clearing are two sides of the same coin. Our endeavours to clear mine-affected areas should be enhanced. A clear commitment to halt deployment of APLs may in turn facilitate commitments to undertake mine-clearing.

The APL issue demands immediate action and we will continue to actively support and take part in the Ottawa Process. We look forward to the meeting in Brussels in June which will be the first session where a concrete treaty text is to be negotiated. Norway has offered to host a follow-up meeting in Oslo to facilitate the conclusion and signing of a convention on a total ban in Ottawa in December.

Within the broader global disarmament agenda, there continue to be important areas where the CD can make its contributions. We believe that there is merit in maintaining a forum like the Conference on Disarmament. Therefore, we must do our utmost to provide conditions which can facilitate constructive and concrete work.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Norway for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of Italy, Ambassador Vattani.

Mr. VATTANI (Italy): First of all, Mr. President, I wish to thank you for the kind words you addressed to me. I am delighted to see you in the Chair of this distinguished assembly, as the representative of a country with which Italy has maintained, through centuries, deep relations of cooperation and cultural exchanges of which I, myself, had the privilege, in a previous professional experience, to be a witness and a promoter. Your well-known professional qualities and skills at the diplomatic service of a great nation which has always played, and will play, a decisive role in the international community are a reassuring factor and give us hope to overcome the difficulties hindering, at present, further achievements in this forum. I am persuaded that your talent, insight and qualities of mediation will bring positive results and, to this end, I wish you the best success.

(Mr. Vattani, Italy)

Since this is the last time I take the floor in this distinguished assembly, I want to express, also on behalf of my Government, my warmest wishes for the progress of the activity of an organization which, particularly in the last years, has confirmed, with concrete and undeniable success, its competence as the only world forum for multilateral negotiations on disarmament. My three years' experience here will remain in my memory as a fundamental stage of research and study of the essential components of international negotiations and of their evolution, following trends and criteria always new and in continuous development. In no other situation the opportunity of perceiving the pulse of global political balances is given in such clear terms, even beyond the immediate objective of the negotiations. That is why the essence of the problems involved is bound to spill over to larger fields of interest, only apparently extraneous, and certainly influential.

I often had the impression to have chosen here something like a monastic way of life whose timetable was divided between early-morning working breakfasts, confabulations at the oratory tables, communal refectories (which made me think, sometimes, of the epicurean habits of the convents in the Renaissance times), lengthy debates, evening meditations on the most pressing concerns and spiritual exercises to keep alive an almost ascetic tolerance. A climate, anyway, of ever ongoing reflection and intellectual exercise which has kept at least my brain alert in spite of the workload, where perseverance, patience and conciliatory will were often put to the test.

Having arrived in Geneva at the time when, after a decade of efforts, the first significant agreement, following the end of the cold war, to ban chemical weapons, had been concluded, I had the opportunity, together with you all, to work on the CTBT negotiations. Such negotiations, successfully concluded, constitute a decisive event to meet the objective of a progressive containment and reduction of the nuclear threat. But looking at the immediate perspectives of the activity in this forum and notwithstanding the present difficulties for the launch of the numerous initiatives on hold, as additional potential factors for significant political successes and reaffirmation of the tasks of this Conference, I wish to recall the recent appeal of my Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lamberto Dini, in this forum. He called on us to overcome divisions and obstacles, in order to satisfy the expectations of the international community, which is looking at us with great attention, and to try and achieve those results to which our moral and civil duties bind us.

Moreover, I wish to express my regret at not having witnessed the further expansion in the membership of this Conference with the admission, in particular, of my partners of the European Union who, like the Republic of Ireland, have always devoted great commitment to the cause of peace and disarmament. To them, I renew the wish to see their legitimate aspirations finally realized, as my Government has repeatedly advocated.

Leaving this room, I will bring with me more than the dark representations of human fate and destiny, painted in such daunting frescoes of a Catalan mind (frescoes that I watched at leisure from the perspective of the four angles of this table). I will bring along also more precious remembrances: the recollection of the friendship and warm human feelings I

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have perceived from many partners in our daily efforts, some of whom have left in the history of this institution the mark of their strong personality. I wish to recall those who have recently left us to undertake new challenging tasks, in particular the former representative of France, Ambassador Errera, the Ambassador of Pakistan, Kamal, and the dynamic Ambassador of Germany, Hoffmann. I would also like to convey the expression of my deep esteem to Ambassador Ledogar, who, like me, is on the point of taking leave of this Conference and who, since a long time, is the dean of the diplomatic community on disarmament affairs. I do hope in my next post of assignment to have the opportunity to meet again the friends of the Conference on Disarmament, not only for the great pleasure of getting together again but also to keep alive my interest for the evolving activity of this forum which, after all, remains the best club in town.

We are on the eve of celebrating the Easter festivities, symbol of peace and reconciliation throughout the world (peace and reconciliation toward which His Holiness the Pope, John Paul II, invited us on the occasion of the World Day of Peace), and I want to address my best wishes to you all, to my dear friend Ambassador Petrovsky, to his deputy, Mr. Bensmail, and to all the members of the secretariat who, with their generous assistance, have done so much to facilitate the implementation of my commitment on behalf of my country, so devoted to the cause of a more safe, stable and prosperous world.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Italy for his statement and for the kind words addressed to me. I should like to give the floor to the representative of Switzerland, Ambassador Hofer.

Mr. HOFER (Switzerland) (translated from French): Mr. President, allow me first of all to congratulate you on taking up the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament. The Swiss delegation feels particular satisfaction at seeing you guide our deliberations. It bears in mind the important role that you yourself and the State you represent so well are playing in our Conference. I cannot conceal from you the great hopes that we place in your presidency. We earnestly hope that it can lead to a concrete programme of work. I would also like to pay tribute to your predecessor, Mr. Pavel Grecu, chargé d'affaires of the Romanian Mission, who, thanks to his exemplary personal devotion, moved us forward by further clarifying our respective positions.

While today I will address several problems which have to do with the agenda adopted on 14 February last, I wish to confirm above all - and I reiterate here the profound conviction of Switzerland - that the Conference is faced with a priority task which is that of launching, without delay and without preconditions, negotiations on a multilateral treaty to ban the production of fissile material for military purposes. While emphasizing this priority, I think it would be useful to mention two other subjects here which reflect Switzerland's concerns.

The "Convention on the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons" will come into force on 29 April next, that is, during the inter-sessional period of this Conference. Switzerland impatiently awaits the implementation of this Convention, which is the fruit of long years of negotiations in our

(Mr. Hofer, Switzerland)

institution. During these negotiations the United States of America and the Russian Federation played a crucial role, bearing in mind the enormous arsenals of chemical weapons in their possession, stockpiles whose destruction is due to be completed at the latest 10 years after the entry into force of this Convention. In this respect Switzerland welcomed the conclusion in 1990 of a bilateral agreement between these two countries on the joint verification of the destruction of their chemical weapons.

Switzerland is contributing actively to the implementation of this Convention, which it ratified two years ago. Our contribution takes the form, inter alia, of the organization of training courses for international inspectors of the future Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, OPCW/OIAC. Supported jointly by the Swiss Government and my country's private chemical industry, this course provides for training in the inspection of civilian facilities, as laid down in the Convention. In all, 76 candidate inspectors will follow the programme. The first contingent, numbering 38 participants from 30 States, began its work on 4 March last. This work will be concluded on 14 April, that is, two weeks before the entry into force of the Convention.

Following the sudden withdrawal of the United States from the OPCW/OIAC Preparatory Commission inspector training programme, Switzerland agreed to the request made by that body's Provisional Technical Secretariat to train a higher number of inspectors this month in Spiez, in the field of chemical production technology. The Swiss instructors in charge of this course were impressed by the quality, professional experience and devotion of these candidate inspectors, who have shown a remarkable spirit of teamwork. Beyond any doubt they will be able to discharge with success and professionalism the difficult task of inspector in the future international organization. The inspectors will be deployed, inter alia, in the verification of chemical weapons facilities. In this respect the candidates expressed their alarm about the fact that the two main possessors of chemical weapons production facilities have not yet ratified the Convention.

Switzerland too is concerned about the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention without the participation of the United States of America and the Russian Federation. This development brings with it not only the risk of weakening the present efforts being made in non-proliferation and multilateral disarmament, but also sends out a highly ambiguous signal to those States which have not yet finally renounced the use of chemical weapons. In this area the United States of America and the Russian Federation bear a special responsibility towards the international community. The bilateral meeting beginning today in Helsinki at presidential level might provide an opportunity to speed up the process of ratification and the implementation of the bilateral agreement we have already mentioned.

Today I am in a position to inform the Conference on Disarmament that Switzerland has the honour to convey invitations to an international seminar of experts on ballistics and its traumatic effects to all the delegations to the Conference as well as the States parties to the "Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects".

(Mr. Hofer, Switzerland)

In this regard it is appropriate to indicate the framework into which this seminar falls. As you are aware, the most important conventions at present in force concerning small arms are as follows: the St. Petersburg Declaration of 1868; the Hague Declaration concerning the Prohibition of Using Bullets Which Expand or Flatten Easily in the Human Body dated 1899; the 1907 Hague Convention respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land; and the 1977 first Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts.

We note a gap between the field of application of these international instruments and the opportunities provided by technical progress in the development of a type of munitions which formally comply with them. At this very moment the use of certain munitions violates the aim and the spirit of these conventions, to say the very least, in our opinion. We should consequently ponder how this situation might be remedied. Like the International Committee of the Red Cross, which recalled the importance of drawing up a new protocol on munitions and small arms at the time of the Final Declaration of the Review Conference on the "Inhumane Weapons" Convention, Switzerland attaches particular importance to this problem. Encouraged by other States, it has decided to organize an international seminar intended to deal in detail with questions connected with the traumatic effects of ballistics. On this subject the experts will be enabled to identify the practical effects of such weapons, taking account of the humanitarian aspects, and to carry out technical tests which will make it possible to evaluate the reference methods. Their present legal status will also be examined.

For your information, the seminar will take place in Thun on 17 and 18 September next. It will enable specialists and scientists from all over the world to discuss this subject. It goes without saying that the States parties to the "Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons" as well as the States participating in the Conference on Disarmament are warmly invited to participate by sending two of their experts. For this purpose an invitation giving details about this event will be sent to the missions in the next few days. As of now my authorities are looking forward to welcoming you to Thun, near Bern.

The PRESIDENT: I thank the representative of Switzerland for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ambassador Nasseri.

Mr. NASSERI (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am not taking the floor today to make a general statement in a written form in the normal way, but to address the situation that the Conference is in. I think that has been the focus of our attention for the last few months and shall remain, and continue to remain, the focal point of our attention until we find a final solution and come to a conclusion on how we do our work this year.

For this year and this session, work started rather early. In fact, Ambassador Dembinski, the last President in 1996, started consultations as early as when the General Assembly was meeting in New York, and this was following the desire of this Conference to try to prepare itself for the work that it needs to take up for the year 1997. Through those discussions, ideas

(Mr. Nasser, Islamic Republic of Iran)

were raised. We have an initiative by the Secretary-General, Mr. Petrovsky, which was an interesting one. That was evolved into a proposal by our first President this year, Ambassador Sun, on the agenda for the Conference, which to us was a very interesting proposal, and we were hoping that we could have an agreement on the basis of that proposal. We had one month of discussion. We eventually came to the conclusion that perhaps the only, or at least the quickest, way to have an agreement on the agenda was to revert to the previous year's agenda and adopt it. It is not the best thing that we would have desired. We would have felt that the draft agenda presented by Ambassador Sun was more in tune with the priorities of the international community and reflected generally various resolutions that were adopted at the General Assembly. But in any case, we welcome the decision in order to ensure that the actual work can commence as early as possible. Since then, there has been a whole lot of consultation among the delegations to the Conference in various forms, and our ex-President, Mr. Greco, even took it upon himself to go through a very lengthy process of discussing bilaterally with all delegations to see whether he can, through these consultations, this new form of consultations, come up with some suggestions and proposals as to how the work can be done.

Eventually, I believe we have now in the Conference a good collection of information as to where the positions stand. Yet we are not any closer at this point, it seems, to a final solution on the programme of work than we were two months ago. Of course, part of this is perhaps something that was anticipated. I recall that after the success of the CWC negotiations, we had to spend a few months to eventually be able to decide what would be the next step for the CD, and what would be taken up for negotiations. Therefore, it is unrealistic to assume that we should have been able to make a very quick decision right at the outset of this year's session. Yet the situation seems to be a bit different than at the time when we started CTBT negotiations. We are moving towards a situation of deep recession, hoping that something eventually will come up. But I think there is a risk that, in a sense, we are perhaps moving towards a deepening of the stalemate that exists at this juncture.

Now we are fortunate, Sir, that a person of your calibre, your qualities, your experience is taking charge of this Conference, and more than congratulating you for the assumption of the presidency, I sincerely wish to congratulate ourselves for having you in the Chair. I am certain that you are thinking, and thinking hard, and exploring ways to move forward. At least personally, I know how irritated you are about the continuation of this current state of affairs.

The approach that has been taken up so far apparently has been that there are some difficult areas and issues which we have to first resolve, and then other items on the agenda will simply fall in place. We are beginning to think that perhaps we are not taking the best and the most appropriate approach at this juncture, continuing to hope that some delegations which have some strong national positions on certain issues, which we do respect and we should fully respect, would eventually be able to show some flexibility. But simply waiting for that time, that magical time, to happen may not be the best way that this Conference can hope to be able to engage in real and actual work.

(Mr. Nasserî, Islamic Republic of Iran)

There are areas where there seems to be, at least, no objection at this stage. So in our view, perhaps it is better to concentrate on those areas, get some work started, and at the same time continue our consultations in some regulated way in order to arrive at a conclusion on other more difficult issues. It is in this light that we are proposing today, formally, a programme of work, which I assume has just been distributed. I believe it is self-explanatory. The Conference, in our view, can move immediately to establish two ad hoc committees, one on NSA, where we already have a consensus mandate, which has been the basis the negotiations of the Ad Hoc Committee in the past and is simply the continuation of those negotiations, and the other on agenda item 7, Transparency in armaments.

The Conference of course cannot limit itself to the work of these two ad hoc committees. We therefore are proposing that a special coordinator be appointed to deal with issues under item 1 of the agenda and to report to us as to what would be the best arrangement to be followed by the Conference.

The same goes for item 6 of the agenda, where we also propose that a special coordinator be appointed. Of course, this is for the programme of work as far as the items on the agenda are concerned. Consultations have been going on about appointing special coordinators on the agenda and on the expansion of the membership, which has not been mentioned here.

We should at the same time recognize that we are more or less pressed by time. That is, we cannot, for instance, have special coordinators who would report to us at the end of this year, and then we leave and come back next year and be in the same position. Therefore, in our proposal, we have suggested that the Conference will receive an interim report by the end of May and a final report no later than mid-June 1997. And mid-June means a few days before the end of the second part of the session. And there our intention is, one way or the other, to really come to a conclusion on these other issues as much as possible by the end of the second part of the session, so that at least for the third part of the session we will know where we stand.

This is our proposal. We are making this proposal, and I say it in the most sincere way, with no political agenda. We, as Iran, have been able to go along with any proposal, any proposal on the programme of work, as long as the Conference can engage itself to do some work, and not sit idle and discuss, in ways that are becoming rather intolerable. I should say the issue of the agenda and the programme of work. We would have accepted the establishment of an ad hoc committee on any of the items on the agenda. So, we are flexible, and I believe a large number of delegations here are flexible, and they simply wish to see that the Conference engages in some substantive work as soon as possible, and I think that moment has come. "As soon as possible" is not an unlimited time. That time has already arrived, and it is in that light that we are making this proposal. We hope that this does not harm any delegation's position. We think it does not, and that has been the spirit behind this. We hope that we can have an agreement on this as soon as possible. In fact, we are proposing that a decision be taken on this proposal at our next plenary.

Having said that, I have to say a few words with a very warm heart about Ambassador Vattani. I shall simply and very briefly say that this Conference is going to miss a very knowledgeable expert, a very tactful diplomat and a charming, charming personality, and for me, I can say, a very, very dear

(Mr. Nasser, Islamic Republic of Iran)

friend. I wish him the best of success both in his professional life and also in his personal life, and I hope that he will invite us where he is going to visit him because we, as the most favourite club in town, like usually to be invited to places we go, rather than going on our own. Ciao, Alessandro.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his statement, for the kind words addressed to the Chair, and also for his proposal. And now I would like to give the floor to the distinguished representative of the United States of America, Ambassador Ledogar.

Mr. LEDOGAR (United States of America): I take the floor today for the last time. It is both a happy and ironic coincidence that I do so under your Presidency, Ambassador Berdennikov, given that the United States and Russia have for so many years been at the heart of what goes on in this chamber. Thus it seems to mouth the usual platitudes about how pleased I am to see you in the Chair, and how we should celebrate the progression of the alphabet, would somehow trivialize this curious circumstance.

As you pointed out, I have served in Geneva for more than seven years, and I have been fortunate enough to participate in some of the CD's most worthwhile and enduring enterprises. The Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty are monuments to what this body can achieve when its members wish to do so. The successful conclusion of these treaties in effect ratifies the worth of the multilateral negotiating process, even if universal ratification of the treaties themselves may be problematic. And, we must remember, this process is all we have going for us in the global effort to reduce the level of armaments in the world and to stabilize their effect.

My sense of pride in these accomplishments is tempered, however, by growing frustration with what I can only describe as a doomed effort to force the nuclear Powers to negotiate now in this forum the elements of a disarmament process that they are conducting elsewhere. The implacable hefters of this linkage crowbar have blocked all work in this body for the foreseeable future, even work which is in the best interests of this body's members. There is a self-defeating effort - one which works to the disadvantage of the entire world community. The CD is supposed to be strictly a negotiating body, but it is not immune to the laws of politics. And politics, as we all know, is the art of the possible. I can only hope, as I take leave of you, that a sense of realism will once again assert itself in the CD, and that the members will not allow it to be paralysed by unrealistic and impolitic demands. The real disarmament needs of the world community are simply too overwhelming and urgent. The CD should do what it can do, and help where it can help. It should seek to achieve again the importance that was its due in the past. It should not try to insist on the undoable.

Nuclear disarmament is happening now. It will happen more and even faster in the future. That the CD cannot for the foreseeable future have the governing role in the process in no way detracts from the importance of the CD's mission to seek multilateral arms control agreements of use to the entire world, nor from its stature as the world's only global arms control negotiating body.

(Mr. Ledogar, United States)

My seven-plus years here have been graced by close association with some of the world's sharpest and most competent diplomats. I have not agreed with some of them; in fact, at one time or another my instructions have caused me to be at odds with many of you. My style is not agreeable to many, either - a fact I recognize with an ambivalent mixture of pride and regret. I called the shots as I saw them, and I took a few hits in the process. But I can honestly say that this association, from my point of view, has never been anything less than professional and respectful, and that together we have achieved much of lasting value.

It remains only for me to thank you - my colleagues and your staffs - for the seriousness and the professionalism with which you have treated me and my delegation over the years. I also thank the interpreters, other providers of conference services and all the members of the international secretariat for their support and attention to the needs of the Conference on Disarmament in general, and of my delegation in particular. The sense of dedication to the task of multilateral disarmament which has been entrusted to the CD by the international community is manifest in the professionalism of all who work with or in this body. It speaks well for the CD, and it gives me hope that the Conference will endure and prosper.

Thank you also for your kind words addressed to me and my family, and a special thanks and mutual farewell to my friend, Alessandro Vattani of Italy.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Russian): I thank the distinguished representative of the United States for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. That concludes my list of speakers for today. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I see none.

Distinguished delegates, you have heard the proposal officially introduced by the distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who proposed inter alia that a decision should be taken on his proposal at the next plenary meeting. As usual, Presidential consultations will be held next Thursday with the coordinators of the groups in our Conference, and I hope that during those consultations I will be informed of the views of the groups on the proposal made by the distinguished representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference, and the last of this part of the session, will be held next Thursday, 27 March at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11.20 a.m.